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PRACTICAL DISCOURSES

OF THE

REV. CHRISTOPHER BRIDGE MARSH,

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LATE PASTOR OF THE

NORTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

NEWBURYPORT.

Published by his Hearers.

—HE BEING DEAD, YET SPEAKETH—

NEWBURYPORT:

PRINTED BY JOHN MYCALL,

MDCCXCIV.



TO THE PUBLIC.

AS the impression of the following Sermons has been omitted, till many persons have risen up in the congregation, where the Author fulfilled his Ministry, and finished his course, who never had any personal acquaintance with him, the friends and hearers of the Rev. Mr. MARSH, claim the candor of the Public, while they gratefully preface these practical Discourses, with his Character, as justly delineated, by the Rev. MOSES HALE, of Newbury, and published in the Essex Journal, soon after his death.

Newburyport, December 22, 1773.

ON Friday the 3d of December, instant, died, and on the 7th was decently buried, the Rev. CHRISTOPHER BRIDGE MARSH, in the 30th year of his age, Pastor of the North Congregational Church, in Newburyport.—He was the only son of Mr. DANIEL MARSH, a Deacon of the first church in Boston; and was of a studious and contemplative turn of mind, from his childhood. He entered College, in Cambridge, in his 14th year, received his first degree in 1761; began to preach in 1764; and was soon after called to be chaplain at Castle William; where he continued between two and three years; in which time his ministry was apparently owned and blessed, to the spiritual good of a number; in whom there was a very visible reformation.

ation.—He was ordained October 19th, 1768, at the unanimous desire of the Church and Congregation: The ecclesiastical council, who assisted at that solemnity, were much pleased to find him well furnished by the Father of Lights, with ministerial gifts and qualifications;—and their then raised expectations have not been disappointed—He had a penetrating mind, ready invention, and solid judgment; thought and reasoned correctly. He had a peculiar talent for the exercises of the pulpit; far from being formal, his prayers were very serious, well conceived, pertinent, instructive, seemed to flow from the fulness of his heart, and tended to excite a spirit of humble devotion in those that joined with him. His Sermons were accurate; the great doctrines of the gospel were what he mainly insisted upon in his public discourses: He came into his subject with ease and readiness, handled it with perspicuity; his language was easy and striking: He seemed a stranger to affectation, and there was no appearance of any aim or desire to recommend himself, but the truth, for the honor of God and the salvation of immortal souls. His whole deportment in the pulpit was very grave and solemn, and his preaching both as to the matter and manner, was happily calculated to enlighten the mind, awaken the conscience and affect the heart, and lead the hearers into the knowledge of themselves, and the way of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ: And few preachers were more successful in gaining and fixing the atten-

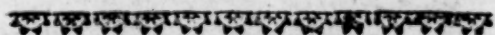
tion of their hearers. And as he preached, so he lived, exhibiting in his conversation satisfying evidence that he believed, was influenced and governed by the truths he preached to others—He had a benevolent, meek and humble mind; and the government of his passions and appetites in an eminent degree. He was remarkably dead to the world, the pomp, honors and pleasures of it; and appeared but very little to regard either the applause or censure of men: He was endowed with an eminent degree of true fortitude; and was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; nor afraid at any time, or in any place, to speak and plead for the truth; was no flatterer, but a faithful reprover in public and private. He was something reserved, and preferred silence, to loquacity, except when speaking was necessary and might be for edification; yet was sociable and pleasant with his intimate friends and acquaintance. He had a tender and affectionate regard for his people, and seemed willing to spend and be spent in promoting their spiritual and eternal interests: and in return, they highly esteemed, loved, and honored him. A delightful harmony subsisted between them, during the five years of his continuance, as their Pastor, and they were very happy in each other.—He was confined about two months, most of the time he was exceeding weak, could not see much company, and able to speak but little to those that attended him; and

and, at times, appeared not to have the full exercise of his reason, 'till within a few days of his death, when he appeared very patient and composed; discovered no dread of death, but a chearful resignation to the will of God. Very few have appeared on the stage of life, in a public character, who have acted their part better, and with more amiable simplicity and godly sincerity.— And in his removal from this world, his flock have sustained a very affecting and grievous loss; in which the neighbouring churches also are partakers. His father is left to mourn a very desirable, dutiful, only son; and his death is greatly regretted by his surviving brethren in the ministry, who were acquainted with him, especially by those with whom he was associated. Yet let not his mourning flock or friends faint, nor be discouraged, under this heavy rebuke, but consider it as the chastening of the Lord, and hope and trust in Him, who is the repairer of breaches and restorer of paths to dwell in.

N. B. THESE Sermons are not selected from others, because they are deemed more worthy of impression;— but because legible, while the most of Mr. Marsh's discourses were either delivered extempore, or left in short hand, which but few persons can transcribe, without great labour.



S E R M O N I.



M A T T H E W xviii. 20.

WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM.



NLY repeating this, and reflecting that it is a declaration of our Lord Jesus Christ, is enough to solemnize our souls; for if we are met in the name of Christ, then this promise is fulfilled, and if we are not met in his name, yet his essential presence, as God, is with us. He is beholding our thoughts and taking account of us, that he may judge us at last. The text is a gracious promise to the Church, or a declaration of truth, for the comfort, encouragement,

ment, and quickening of the Disciples of Christ. It is a token of his infinite condescension, and may well be esteemed a peculiar privilege.—But—What are we to understand by being gathered together in Christ's name? And what by Christ's being in the midst of such as are thus gathered together? These questions I shall endeavour to answer.

I. What are we to understand by being gathered together in Christ's name?

SOME suppose that this verse treats particularly of the subject of discipline, and found their supposition on the eighteenth verse of the context, where Christ says, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But I see no reason why the nineteenth and twentieth verses should not be considered as detached from the foregoing, especially when we observe the manner in which the nineteenth verse is ushered in, notes it to be the beginning of another discourse, and on another subject. "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." When it is said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, three things may be intended. 1. Meeting at the command of Christ. 2. Relying on his grace and merits. 3. Meeting with a view to his glory, and the interests of his kingdom.

First. We may be said to meet in Christ's name, when we meet by virtue of his command, when Christ's will is the reason of our meeting, when we meet, out of obedience to his command, and a sacred regard to his authority. Christ has commanded his disciples to meet together for religious exercises, and not to forsake the assembling themselves together. See Rom. x. 25. They are commanded to exhort one another daily, which cannot be done, without meeting together. When christians think it their duty to meet together for social worship, they act out of obedience to Christ, and they are disposed to do so: hence we are told, Mal. iii. 16. that they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and that the Lord heard it. Hence, also, the apostle exhorts the Thessalonian saints, to comfort themselves together, and to edify one another. See 1st Thess. v. 11. Christians have various spiritual gifts, and they ought to be used for mutual edification, for a manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and not to lie useless. Private christians are qualified in a greater or less degree, to exhort, to teach, to comfort, and to quicken their brethren. In these respects, the head cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee, nor any one member to another.—It is doubtless, agreeable to the will of Christ, that christians should frequently gather together and exercise those gifts for one another's spiritual good, to pray with one another, and to encourage each other.

Now, if those who gather together in the name of Christ, do it out of obedience to him, then such as do it not out of obedience to him, do not gather together in his name. Persons may meet together, without being influenced by the command of Christ, without doing so, because it appears to be the mind of Christ. Here it may be observed, that if it appears to be the mind of Christ, it cannot be omitted, without sin. So that when persons assemble, as a matter of indifference, which they may either do or not, then there is no obedience to Christ in it. If persons attend, thinking they may stay away and not sin, then they do not come, out of obedience, for if Christ does not, in their view, require it, then there is not any obedience in it, even in the view of the persons, themselves. If Christ does require it, then not to comply, would be sin, and so it is with regard to every thing else.

Objection. This is strictness indeed, for at this rate we either perform an act of obedience, or sin in every thing we do.

Answer. True: This is strict, and it is therefore agreeable to every humble soul. No person of an humble spirit desires to be his own master in any thing. This doctrine does, indeed, tend to humble mankind, for if every action is either duty or sin, then we never can do any thing that is meritorious. Then,
says

says the unhumbled sinner, there is no encouragement to the practice of holiness, if one can never do any thing better than he is obliged to do, and cannot neglect doing to his utmost, without sinning.—Hence unhumbled sinners have no heart to do any thing in religion, unless under a notion of something very excellent and praise-worthy, not being willing to esteem themselves, after all, but unprofitable servants.——Men may join in religious services, and do it wholly from the influence of pride, not merely to be seen of men, but to appear to themselves to be religious godly persons, as well as to show their gifts, and be admired by others. And an abundance of reasons there may be, beside obedience to Christ, by which persons may be excited to put on the appearance of religion.

Secondly. WHEN persons are gathered together in Christ's name, they expect and desire acceptance only for Christ's sake. To pray in the name of Christ, is to pray, pleading Christ's worthy name, as the only ground on which we would be accepted of God. So, to gather together in Christ's name, is to perform all parts of service to God on the score of Christ's merits. It implies an hearty acknowledgement of our own unworthiness, and a conviction of our infinite indebtedness—that we stand bound to fulfil the whole law of God and that we deserve all its penalties—that if we had our desert, we should be
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beyond any encouragement to any religious duties, for this is certainly the case with us. We are in debt—infinately behind hand, we owe ten thousand talents and all the services we could do to all eternity, though most sincere and fervent would never pay a single farthing. Our persons are dead, in law. Our all is forfeited, and nothing but sovereign mercy intervenes between us and the eternal pains of hell. Our persons are condemned, and nothing therefore ought to be accepted at our hands, however pure, until we are pardoned. Even our best services are impure, and need a pardon. Every thought of God, though most serious and reverent, is far short of what becomes his infinite majesty; and every desire is mixed with impurity. Every prayer is defiled with selfish ends or self-righteousness. Every duty is defective, at least, as to that single aim we ought to have to the glory of God, in it. To gather together in the name of Christ, implies a sense of the exceeding excellency and worthiness of Christ, and faith in him as given to be a sacrifice for sinners. This is the only encouragement for us sinners, and this is enough—a far better and surer foundation, than our own perfect personal obedience. Without the knowledge of Christ, and faith in him, there is no meeting together in his name—no uniting in supplication to God, for his sake. All the attempts of unregenerate men, when busied in seeking peace,
issue

issue in this, they attempt to find some other reason of acceptance, beside the righteousness of Christ.

Thirdly. When persons meet together in the name of Christ, their end is something appertaining to the honor of Christ and the advancement of his interest in the world.

THERE is in the hearts of true christians, an insatiable thirst after the honor of Christ their Lord and Master—a perpetual disposition to set him up in the world, and to bring others to know and love him, and when they are excited to meet by those inclinations, they meet in the name of Christ. Any design agreeable to the mind of Christ, is an evidence of their meeting in his name. If they meet for their own mutual edification in holiness, to pray with and strengthen one another—if to do honor to their common Master, by separating themselves from the world, to his service—by professing their esteem for him and love to him—by encouraging each other to diligence, fidelity, watchfulness, and vigour in his service; to enlighten one another's minds in the things of Christ; to comfort the feeble-minded; to have an interest in each other's prayers: Or if the design of their meeting respect others; if they assemble together to pray for the out-pouring of the Spirit—for a revival of religion, either in the place where they live, or in their families—among their children, friends or neighbours—or in the church of God, to which they belong:—

belong:—If they aim to fit themselves for usefulness in their places—if they gather together to pray for the whole church of God, the members of which are scattered abroad in the earth—if they pray for the spread of the gospel, and the overthrow of Satan, &c.—When these are their real ends and designs, then it is in the name of Christ that they meet. None can aim at those ends, but such as have the spirit of Christ, for these are the ends for which Christ came into the world, and those that have an heart to desire and long for them, have the same mind in them that was in Christ.

II. What are we to understand by Christ's being in the midst of them that are gathered together in his name?

To answer this question with the greater distinctness, I would observe (first) that we are not merely to understand that Christ is essentially present with them as he is with all his creatures; because he evidently promises those that gather together in his name, some peculiar blessing. He is present with them in some special sense. Nor (secondly) are we to suppose they have Christ's bodily presence with them, for that is only in heaven. This is implied in that declaration of the Holy Ghost, who says of him "Whom the heavens must receive, till the times of the restitution of all things. See Acts iii. 21.—Christ is not bodily present on earth; much less in ten thousand places at once, as the Papists and Lu-

therans hold, and as he would be, if he was present, in this sense, with every little worshipping society.

CHRIST may be said to be present with such as are met in his name, in the following respects :

1. As he approves of them and takes delight in them. He looks down with pleasure on their assembly. Their services, if sincere, ascend as a sweet smelling favor. Christ has been at great expense, he has done and suffered much. For what? To redeem to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. He delivers them from their spiritual enemies. For what? that we might serve him, without fear, all the days of our lives. He gave himself for his chosen people. For what? that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. When christians, therefore, exercise the grace of God in them, they shew the happy fruits of Christ's death. This was the very end that Christ aimed at. All persons are pleased as they attain their ends, and so is Christ. It is a great honor to Christ, that there should be any number of creatures recovered to a life of holiness, out of the ruined state of the world, by his means. It is a strange, a surprising thing, when all men were become obnoxious to the wrath of God, that there should be any brought into such a state, and capacity, to offer to God an acceptable service, and Christ

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looks down, we may say, with infinite satisfaction, on every gracious exercise—on the meanest solitary christian, that has gracious sincerity. To this man, says he, will I look.

2. WITH those that are gathered together in the name of Christ, he is present, assisting them in carrying on their services. He sends his holy spirit to enlighten their minds, and make them acquainted with the things of God, to make them know the things that are freely given them of God—to stir up their graces into exercise—to confirm their faith—to encourage their hope—to enlarge his church—to increase their patience, to help their infirmities, and to make intercession for them. He sends down his spirit into their hearts, whereby they cry, Abba, Father. He teaches them to pray—shews them what they want—what is contained in the promises—and where to go for a supply. He fills them with love to God and one another, and to all men, but especially to the household of faith.

3. Christ is present with such as he succeeds, and blesses them in their desires, and hears their prayers, and gives answers of peace. This seems more especially intended in the text, as appears from verse 19th. So again, John xiv. 13. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Again in verse 14th, If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. No prayer
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of faith shall fall to the ground. The tears of sincere penitents are bottled up in heaven, and all the prayers of christians are recorded in heaven. Christ has an ear ever open to their requests, and an arm always ready to help them.

4. CHRIST is present to remember all their services, that he may reward them. Every time Christ's disciples meet together, to do him honor, he sees it, is pleased with it, records it, and will one day amply reward them for it. Those that honor him, he will honor. Indeed, one kind of reward they cannot be without hereafter, and that is, the full accomplishment of all that their souls here thirst after. All their spiritual desires and longings center in this, that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. This they will see brought to pass, in the most evident and complete manner, before the whole world, when Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. But, besides, as none can give a cup of cold water, in love, without being rewarded, so two or three christians never meet together in the name of Christ, but they will be rewarded for it. Is not this a wonderful consideration! That they should be rewarded for what they ought to do! When a servant hath done his duty to his master, doth he thank that servant? I trow not. Yet these unprofitable services shall be rewarded. Not one act of faith; not one act of christian-fellowship

fellowship with one another, as Christ's disciples, shall lose its rewards—not one sincere petition—not an hymn of praise sung with the heart—not a word of comfort in Christ's name to a weary soul, but shall be abundantly rewarded. It will appear another day, that Christ has been ever present with his people—that not a prayer has been offered up—not two or three met together, whether in the house of public worship—in a private dwelling house—in the open fields—in the highway—in a stable, or in the wilderness, but Christ has been present, as he was with Nathaniel under the fig-tree. At this time, Christ is present by his essential presence, with every one of us, whether we be sincere, or not, and his gracious presence is with those that worship him in spirit and truth. Not a thought can now enter into our hearts of love, or praise, or thanksgiving, or admiration, or desire, but Christ knows it and will take notice of it in that day when every secret thing shall be brought into judgment, whether it be good or evil. Christ sees that he may reward, not because there is any reason in the thoughts themselves why they should be rewarded. Were they perfect, they would render us but unprofitable servants, much less when they are so lame and defective, though sincere. But he rewards them with a reward that he has procured, for all them that love him, at an infinite expense; and which he will bestow for his own sake, to shew his abundant
grace

grace and loving kindness. It will be a reward of grace, not to signify and represent the worth of his people's services, but to illustrate his own abundant and unparalleled bounty.

I M P R O V E M E N T.

1. HENCE learn the condescension of Christ. He is served by his holy angels, crying out day and night, with perfect services. They are glorious spirits, much superior to us in knowledge, power, and wisdom, as well as in holiness. Yet he takes notice of his disciples here, though they are very sinful; though their righteousnesses are as filthy rags, though they are guilty creatures; that deserve to die, who love him but very little, who are very unbelieving—though they weary him and affront him every day. How mean are our best services, compared with those of heaven, where there is no sin, and where Christ is worshipped in perfection! Christ wants none of his creatures, not even angels, he needs none of their services, and yet has as gracious a regard to every degree of true affection in sinful men, as though he stood in the greatest need. No ambitious, vain-glorious prince, is more pleased with the homage of his subjects, than Christ the Lord of glory is with the service of true believers, though he is infinitely above receiving any essential honor from the best services
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of his best creatures. He is the maker of all things; the world was made by him: he is surrounded by myriads of bright and spotless beings, hymning his praise, casting their crowns at his feet: Yet such is his condescension, that he has told us, that in whatever place two or three only, of the sinful, guilty children of men are collected, that one would think had better be shut up in eternal darkness, he is graciously in the midst of them, and will plentifully reward them, if they are but gathered in his name.—What astonishing condescension is here! Let them be sinners that have proceeded to the greatest height of contempt, and opposition to him—let them be assembled in the darkest and most loathsome prison, & clothed in tattered rags—though they be few in number, outcasts from among men—yet, if warmed with genuine affection to Christ—if assembled in his name they may be sure that the King of kings and Lord of lords will give them his presence. Though they ought, had they their deserts, to be in hell, yet Christ, the Judge of men and angels, is pleased to meet with them and bless them. Where can we find a parallel to this?

2. HENCE learn when we may expect the presence of Christ with us in our meetings. Only when we are met in his name. We may meet together professedly for religious duties—engage in them, be long and exemplary, constant and diligent to appearance,

ance, and yet not have Christ with us. If it is not the honor of Christ that we aim at, and his righteousness that we would approach God in, and his kingdom we mean to advance, we have no reason to expect his presence. If love to Christ does not edge us on, if thankfulness to him does not animate and inspire our devotion, we only worship with our lips, and Christ cannot be pleased with us. Hence Christ is never present with any, in the sense of the text, but renewed converted persons, for they only, act from love to him—they only, gather together in his name. It is by faith, only, that any acceptable sacrifice is offered. No performances of the unconverted are pleasing to God. They may be, and often are, blessed to their conversion, but this is wholly of the free uncovenanted grace of God, and not because their services afford any manner of reason, on account of their worthiness, that it should be so. Whether alone or with others, none but Christ's real disciples, those that are devoted to him, and have his honor and the interests of his kingdom, nearer their hearts than any other thing, can reasonably hope for Christ's presence. Christ will not be with his enemies. He will take no notice of their services, unless to punish them. You may be fervent, serious, much engaged, earnest, laborious and incessant in prayer, and yet if you pray not in Christ's name, and for such ends as respect the glory of God, and the honor of Christ,

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your prayers are an abomination. Now give me leave to ask you.

WHAT is it moves and induces you to attend this meeting? Did you come here to please your fancy? To spend a vacant hour? To be entertained by hearing a sermon? To have the pleasure of being in a large company? Look inward. Did a sacred regard to the Lord Jesus Christ bring you? Did you come, sensible of your spiritual wants? With a soul earnestly thirsting after God? Did you hope to meet with Christ here? and to have your hearts humbled into a more delightful submission to him?

3. Hence learn, that we may know whether we have met in Christ's name; or not, by the tokens of his presence. If we have, he will assist us by his holy spirit, fill us with love to him, cause us to believe on him, and give us freedom and boldness with confidence; and afford us relief under spiritual troubles. Do we meet with the saints, and find no good? Receive no spiritual blessing? No conviction? No sense of God's glory? No satisfying views of the pardoning mercy of God? Do we exercise no faith in Christ? No hope of glory? Do we receive no humiliation? Are we hardened? Then we do not gather together to worship in the name of Christ. We must search for the cause. We are unsound at bottom, either wholly, or in part. Do not you find that you can attend meetings, public and private, and be never

ver the better? No more solemnized, no more watchful? Divine things lie with no more weight on your minds? Cannot you follow the world with as much freedom, and pleasure, as ever? And doth not this prove that you are false-hearted? Doth it not give reason to suspect, whether you are, at heart, true to Christ, or not? Whether all is not matter of form and custom, or from some sinister view?

4. HENCE we see great encouragement to frequent gathering together in Christ's name. Mankind are fond of the company of the great ones of the earth. What an honor would it be esteemed to entertain an earthly King? Yet as often as we please, we may have the presence of the King of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ will meet with us whenever we meet together, with hearts disposed to receive and honor him. This, one would think, would make christians desire to assemble together in Christ's name, as often as possible, not forsaking the assembling themselves together, either in a public or more private manner. Suppose Christ was now personally on earth, and all we admitted to visit him, would we not travel, to enjoy such an opportunity?

BUT now we have no need of saying, Who shall ascend into heaven, or descend into the deep, for Christ is not far from any one of us, if we are met in his name. May we have Christ present with us,

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taking pleasure in us, assisting, accepting, and rewarding us? Why then should we not frequent the assemblies of the saints? Why not often collect together in convenient numbers, to worship him and seek his favor? What an invaluable privilege do we enjoy? What multitudes never knew any thing of Christ, and never will, until they see him coming in the clouds of heaven, to take vengeance on all that are in their sins! And we have him preached to us; we have his word, and may have his spiritual sanctifying presence, as often as we are disposed to meet together in his name! Would not a true love to Christ dispose us to form ourselves into societies, in such numbers as is convenient, and meet together as often as is convenient, that we might have Christ with us? If any stranger of high rank, or great merit, arrives among us, how quickly do we flock around, and form companies into which we may invite him? Every one esteems himself highly favored, that can obtain leave to be with him. And is there less regard shewn to this heavenly Visitant, who speaks peace and bestows bliss, where ever he is entertained!

5. From this subject we learn, that there is no reason to be ashamed, because of the smallness of a society. Christians are chosen out of the world, and they make a little flock, compared with the world. Hence, too, the poorest, and those that are cast out of the company of others, have no reason to be
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cast down, if they be but the disciples of Christ.— Hence, also, Christ is present in every family, as often as family worship is performed in a right manner.

SOME think that our Saviour meant, by our text, to contradict a notion of the Jews, that there could not be a congregation with fewer than ten persons.

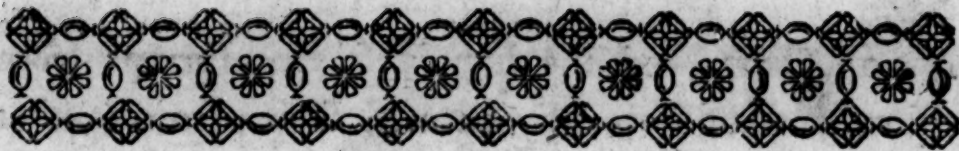
6. Hence persons must be agreed in their professed sentiments concerning Christ, or they cannot expect the presence of Christ, with them all. They must suppose each other to entertain much the same notion, concerning Christ, or they cannot worship together. For instance, if one professes to believe that Christ is a divine person, properly, and eternally possessed of divine attributes, whereby he is true God, & another imagines that Christ is only an exalted creature, but yet infinitely short of divine, how can they gather together in Christ's name? How can they join together in worship? How can they meet together in the name of the same Saviour? So, if one believes he may expect some regard to be paid to him on account of the sincerity of his worship and the integrity of his heart, while the other expects acceptance, only on account of the worthiness of Jesus Christ—What concord or agreement can there be between them? How can they worship together in Charity? Must there not be a visible, professed agreement in matters of such essential importance? Without this, they cannot worship together as fellow-christians, but one will be all the time in the exercise of pity toward

the other, as being fatally deceived. Nor can it be thought any way sufficient, that both should merely profess to believe the bible, because that gives no manner of evidence that their sentiments are alike in these matters, since the bible has had so many different constructions put upon it. Christians are exhorted to be of one accord, of one mind, but we cannot suppose that the apostle meant only that they should all profess, in general, to make the word of God their rule, for we cannot suppose that any to whom he addressed this exhortation, denied the scriptures to be the only rule.

In a word, my brethren, have we any reason to think that Christ has been present with us at this time! If Christ has been present with us, the effects will be lasting. If we have now worshipped in his name, this will not be the last time. The saint shall mount as on eagle's wings, and we shall have an ardent thirst after renewed visits from the King of heaven. We shall seek to find him, when alone.—We shall long after heaven, where we shall have him always present with us. How glorious is the place where Christ always dwells? There we shall see him, not only by faith, as we do here—there we shall have his sensible presence not only at certain times—there we shall not labour under doubts, whether we are accepted, and whether he has our hearts, or not—there we shall not worship him in such small numbers, as we do here: but on the contrary, we shall see him

face to face, behold his glory and be changed into the same image. We shall be ever with the Lord, and have him always with us. We shall be sure that we have his eternal favor—that we love him, and are eternally devoted to him. We shall join the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. And with them, we shall, to all eternity, ascribe blessing and honor, and glory and power, and might and dominion, to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb. To which blessedness, God grant, we may all finally arrive!

A M E N.

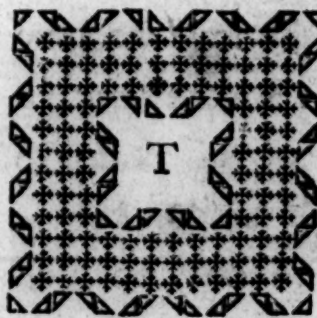


S E R M O N II.

Preached at the ALMS-HOUSE.

2 CORINTHIANS, VI. 10.

—As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.



THE triumphant language used by the apostle Paul, in this passage, did not suit the temper and state of the primitive christians, only. It would be pertinent from the lips of every poor disciple of Christ, to the end of the world. True christianity is the same: the most valuable blessings and privileges of believers are the same now that they were in the days of the apostles. He that came into the world to bear witness to the truth, has declared that his kingdom is not of this world. None are persuaded to become the followers of Jesus Christ, by the promise of earth.

ly possessions, and the happiness that springs from enjoyments of a worldly nature; so far from it, that we are required to relinquish our most beloved friends and every temporal enjoyment, to make a voluntary sacrifice of them all, to the honor and interest of Christ, as we would approve ourselves his true disciples. We are required to forsake all that we have—We are required to retain no other affection for the delights of this present life, or even life itself, than is consistent with an habitual readiness to give them all up at the call of Christ, and from supreme love to him; that is, we are to have no other affection for them, than such as is consistent with a ruling, predominating affection to Christ in our hearts: for how can we be habitually willing to give up our earthly enjoyments for Christ's sake, unless we have in our hearts a love to Christ which is superior to the love we have for them? And this amounts to such a comparative disesteem of them—such deadness of affection to them, that an unsanctified heart would as soon choose to go without them, as to have them only on such terms.

BUT, doth it follow, that, because the gospel of Jesus Christ offers no encouragements that are suited to the taste of a depraved heart, that therefore, it contains a niggardly kind of religion? That it is destitute of such arguments as are adapted to work on the desires and hopes of Mankind? Doth it set nothing

thing before men as a goal, a prize to run for? Doth it promise them no reward for their fidelity and affection? Such an apprehension concerning the gospel, would be very far from what is true and just. Let our blessed Saviour be heard speaking for himself, even when he is inculcating on his disciples the highest instances of self-denial, Mark. x. 29, 30. "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecution, and, in the world to come, eternal life." We cannot understand our blessed Saviour to mean that those who deny themselves for his sake, shall be what the world calls, possessors of an hundred times as many houses, and an hundred times as much land as what they have left, for him. Such a kind of construction would be evidently impossible, with respect to some of the particulars in which Christ instances. It would be ridiculous to suppose that the disciples of Christ should have an hundred times as many brethren, and sisters, and mothers, as they had before. What Christ intends, seems to be this; that where there is such a spirit of self-denial in any person, as will prevail with him to leave all, for Christ's sake, what little he has to do with temporal enjoyments, shall yield him much more real and substantial happiness, than he could any way

have received from them while he was under the power of carnal and corrupt affections; according to that in Psalms xxxvii. 16. "The little that the righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked; And Proverbs xv. 16. "Better is a little, with the fear of the Lord, than great riches, and trouble therewith." "Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, better is the meanest fare, with an heart under the influence of love to God, and in a state of peace with him "than a fatted ox" the most delicious food, and the most sumptuous entertainment, and hatred therewith, with an heart in a state of enmity against God; and, as the unrenewed heart is, in a state of warfare with all God's creatures.

We cannot conceive too highly of the privileges which belong to the heirs of salvation. They are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ: Tho' they walk not, perhaps, as we might expect of persons who are born to such great expectations; neither so holily nor so comfortably—Yet this is not to be charged on the gospel, as if it were in any respect deceitful or defective, but on christians themselves, for having so little of the spirit of grace, and faith in Christ resting on them.—But it is time to consider the text more particularly, *as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

What are we to understand by christians possessing all things? In what sense may they be said to do so?

To

To this question I answer, they may be said to possess all things.

I With respect to the frame and temper of their own minds, and

II. In regard to the relation they stand in to Jesus Christ, who is their Head, and the Lord of all things.

I. They may be said to possess all things, with respect to the temper of their own minds, or the manner in which they stand affected to the enjoyments of this life, on two accounts.

i. They may be said to possess all things, because they are as contented as if they actually had the enjoyment of them, in the sense of the world. This is the case with them so far as they have the true spirit of the Gospel in their hearts. They feel as full and as much satisfied, and as happy, though they are destitute of many blessings which others enjoy, as if they had them all. They do not find that emptiness and want in the absence of worldly enjoyments that other men do, whose hearts are set upon them, and whose happiness is made up of such things. Worldly, temporal good things, do not appear to them so necessary, and of such importance as they do to other men. They have meat to eat that the world knows not of. Their hearts are some where else, and if they cannot boast of so large possessions as many others, they have this for their comfort, that they do not want them. These natural things they do not look

upon as the best good. They do not esteem it any real calamity to go without them, they know it is not a lasting one : And they can comport with many inconveniences, and sustain many hardships, without having the peace of their minds broken in upon, or any alloy to their truest and best happiness. They know that all things are ordered by their heavenly Father, who disposes all things for the best, and if he thinks fit that they should be hungry, or naked, or sick, or in pain, or neglected and despised, they choose it should be so too. Their happiness lies more in having God's will done, than in having their natural disposition gratified. So the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippian converts, when he tells them of the joy he felt at the care they had taken to supply his wants, warning them against understanding him as rejoicing on this account that his outward wants were supplied : He gives them to understand that he was incapable of being in want, as long as the temper of mind he was then in, lasted. "Not, says he, that I speak in respect of want, for I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound. Every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

2. True Christians possess all things, as they possess the art of enjoying all those things with which they have to do, in as valuable and important a sense as if they had them in their own possession. What

is the end of possession, but to improve what we possess? Now if the christian can make as good an improvement of what is possessed by others—if he can put it to as good a use as if it were in his own hands, is it not as well as to possess it himself? and yet there are divers ways in which this may be done. For instance; a christian who has nothing himself, yet if his neighbours around him partake of the blessings of God's providence, he may have the same joy and thankfulness as if he possessed it himself. For suppose we ourselves are plentifully supplied with the good things of this life; what is the most rational and religious kind of joy that such an abundance should excite? Is it the joy of reflecting that we have it in our power to gratify our natural appetites? That we can indulge in sensual pleasures? Or live at our ease, and in a kind of independency? This surely cannot be that improvement of the blessings of providence which is most rational and divine. Must it not be rather the joy that springs from what we observe of God's perfection, in these things? His all-sufficiency, his goodness, his patience? Must it not be the pleasure of being conducted by the streams of God's bounty to Him the all-gracious origin of them? and of adoring God as he manifests himself to us through his creatures? And why may not a christian that loves God and takes delight in all the displays he makes to us of himself, why may not he see as much of God's power and goodness in what are bestowed on others,

as if they were bestowed on himself? Would it be goodness in God to grant me the blessings of providence, and is it not goodness in God, as much, to grant them to others? Is not God to be adored and rejoiced in, for what he bestows on one, as well as for what he bestows on another? Must not that be a very selfish kind of gratitude, that is excited by what is given to me, while I have no sense of gratitude for what my fellow creatures enjoy? This is far from being the spirit of the religion of Christ. A person endowed with any considerable degree of the spirit of Christ, is far from being so contracted and selfish. When he sees how bountiful God is to others, he is ready to adore his mercy and grace, as well as when God is bountiful to him. Though pinched himself, with want, yet it rejoices his heart that God is pleased to display and make known what he is in his goodness to others. And so he possesses what others possess, or makes the most valuable improvement of it. And as to the wisdom, and power, and majesty of God, that are to be seen in his works, the christian may reap the same divine improvement when in the hands of others, as if they were in his own hands. And so far as he has the principle of true Christian benevolence, he will rejoice in, and feel thankful for, the outward happiness that others enjoy, as if it were his own. This will teach him not only to weep with those that weep, but also to rejoice with those that rejoice.

II. Christians may be said to possess all things, on account of their relation to Jesus Christ.

All true believers are so united to Christ, that what belongs to him, doth in a sense belong to them. They are related to him, as the members of the natural body are related to the head, so that he has the absolute command of them, and all that belongs to them, and he orders all things for the good of the body. They are related to him as a wife to her husband, so that all Christ possesses, is their's. They hold fellowship with Christ in all he is, and in all he has. Hence, saith the apostle, *all are your's and ye are Christ's.*—They are related to Christ, as the redeemed servant is related to his master, who bought him. Christ has redeemed them with his precious blood, that they might be his servants. He died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. And all Christ has, belongs to them, as he will take care of them, and provide for them. Because of the relation they stand in to Christ, they may be said to possess all things those several ways.

1. As Christ disposes all things for the best. A child, in his minority, though he has little or nothing at his own disposal, is in much better circumstances than if he was at his own disposal, and the possessor of a large estate, provided he is under the care of a wise and able parent. So a believer is in much better circumstances through his relation to Christ, than if he were possessor of the whole globe, and was def-

titute of the protection and love of Christ; for all things in heaven and earth are at the disposal of his master and head. Rich men may fancy themselves in a more independent state, and look down with pity, if not contempt, on their poor christian neighbours; but they entertain very wrong apprehensions of the matter, if they think themselves in happier circumstances than the most impoverished believer in Christ. The poor christian possesses the wealth of the rich sinner, in a much better and nobler manner than the rich man himself doth. For it is all in the power of Christ, and whenever he sees it necessary for the best interest of his poor disciples, he will, some how or other, convert it to their use and profit. Such is the happy condition of every one that belongs to Christ. All that the world contains, is his, whenever Christ sees that he really needs it.

II. All things are actually improved and disposed of by Christ, for such ends and purposes as lie nearest the heart of the true christian. All things in the heavens and the earth, and the seas, are used for those very ends.

Christ and his disciples are so united that they have but one common interest. There are no ends Christ is pursuing in the government of the world, but what are dear and precious to every believer. Whether it be the glory of God, Christ's own advancement and honor, or the welfare of the church. Now if we were proprietors in all that this world contains, what other

use should we think of putting it all to, but the compassing our own ends by it? And if it is in the hands of some one else who is faithfully applying it, to those self-same ends, is it not the same thing to us, as if we ourselves were disposing and applying it to those ends? especially if it is in the hands of a person who is as zealous to promote those ends, and as capable to do it as we can pretend to be? Now this is just the case with Christ's disciples. Suppose they have nothing, according to that notion of having, that prevails in the world, yet is it not altogether as well for them, when Christ, their head and husband, has all things in possession, and is earnestly engaged to advance those designs that the christian desires should be advanced above all.

When the poor christian takes a survey of the heavens, the earth, and the seas, and the men that dwell on the earth and all they please themselves with and delight in, he may say, with humble joy and thankfulness, all those things which I behold, are mine.— Though they are not at my disposal, yet they belong to Christ, my Master, my friend; and he sits above, and with unlimited authority, and irresistible power, and the most admirable skill, is managing them, and over-ruling them for those purposes which I most delight in. He is disposing them all so as to promote the glory of his, and my heavenly Father, and the enlargement, peace, and eternal salvation of his church; so that I have no reason to envy those who appear to

be more rich and honorable than I am. All the wit and knowledge, power and wealth of all my fellow creatures is rendered subservient to my ends, under the invisible, but infallible influence of my Redeemer and Lord. The glory of my heavenly Father, and the final salvation of God's chosen people, and the overthrow of all the enemies of Christ are perpetually aimed at, and promoted in all these things.

III. Through his relation to Jesus Christ, the believer is heir to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him, and so he may be said to possess all things, as he is heir to that inheritance, in comparison with which, all that the sons of men commonly glory in, is as nothing at all. What is it to be rich in this world's goods, that can only clothe, and feed and pamper the body, compared with being heirs-apparent to the kingdom where our souls will enjoy complete happiness suited to their spiritual and immortal nature?—What is it to be rich in those earthly possessions which we must leave at death, and may leave, long before, and which will stand us in no stead when our bodies are lodged in the grave, compared with having a certain title to eternal mansions in the house of God, and the oath and promise of God, those two immutable things, to assure us of an unspeakable, and never dying, never decaying blessedness in God's presence above?

May not the christian, in this view of the matter, be said to possess all things? for what is there, truly

valuable, that he does not possess, or at least, that is not his in reversion? Do we call a man poor, who is a possessor of gold, because he has not also in his possession, dust and pebble-stones? And shall we call the saint poor, who owns a kingdom and has God for his Father, and Christ for his Redeemer, the Holy Ghost for his sanctifier, and all things working together for his good, and is bound to the shores of immortal glory, because he has not gold and silver, and an abundance of the good things of this world that is devoted to be destroyed by fire? It is an inconsistency for a christian to be in want of any thing, unless it be more of the spirit of Christ in his heart. He is an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ, and can he be in want? We should think it strange if the son of a king should be in want, unless he had forfeited his father's good will and was an outcast from his family. And if a child of God, by faith in Christ, is destitute of any outward good, it is impossible it should be a real want. It is impossible that when God has given a person Himself and his Son, and eternal life, that he should refuse him any outward enjoyment, when he really needs it. So that the christian may be said, in the best sense, to possess all things.

I M P R O V E M E N T.

I. Hence, There is no such thing as being impoverished by becoming Christ's disciples, or the most faithful adherents to his cause. We may lose what is called riches here on earth, and what the sons of

men greedily crave as the best good ; but we cannot lose any thing that is truly valuable, nothing but what it is both our duty and interest to be weaned from and despise. Riches are no part of the blessing God bestows on his children, though he has promised them they shall not want any good thing. We cannot be made so poor, by embracing the gospel and following Christ, but that we may be said to possess all things, in the best of senses that can be. Why then should we be discouraged from giving up ourselves to Christ and forsaking all that we have, for his sake, when it is certain we can be no losers by it? Let what will happen to us, should God call us in his providence, to suffer the loss of all outward things, to be imprisoned, scourged, to suffer by hunger, cold or nakedness, yet we should be in much happier circumstances than any that believe not on Christ, though dressed in scarlet and faring sumptuously every day. We cannot be Christ's disciples, without forsaking all that we have ; but this is like a child's being called to forsake toys and baubles, things of no real value, and things that none but a child would be pleased with, for the sake of durable riches and righteousness.

II. Hence, outward poverty is no just ground of contempt, unless we will despise the apostle Paul and an holy army of Martyrs that have forsaken houses and lands, and wives, and children, and their lives, for Christ's sake. Being poor in this world's goods is not at all inconsistent with being rich in faith. Po-

verty is no judgment. It is no mark of God's displeasure; but rather the scriptures represent the matter as if God ordinarily bestowed riches on wicked men. To the sinner he giveth travel to gather and to heap up: not but that a man may be rich and gracious, too. It is no sin to be rich, and rich men are not commanded to lay aside their wealth and become poor, but to make a good use of their riches; to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, and yet much is said in scripture about the rich, as being very miserable, at least. "Wo unto you rich, for ye have received your consolation. Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven: but then in those passages we are to understand such rich men as have the heart and spirit that really accompany riches.

A poor saint that lives by faith, how much more excellent is he in the sight of God, than the rich sinner! and so he ought to be in our esteem, though we are too apt to court riches and seek the favor of those whom the world calls happy.

III. Hence those that are poor in this world may learn how to become some of the richest persons on earth. Though you are not owners of houses or lands—though you are supported by the charity of others, yet you may become far richer than all the kingdoms of the world could make you. Only believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, become his sincere disciples—forsake your sins—become devoted to the

service, and learn to live to the glory of God—only become united to Christ by faith, and all things shall be your's. You will be entitled to the protection of God's providence, and if you are left destitute of any present good, it will only be with a view to promote your future and eternal good. I cannot promise you that if you become true christians you will be made any richer in temporal respects, but I can promise this, if it will be best for you; and could you yourselves desire riches on any other condition? I can promise you, that you shall be high in God's favor, and that in the world to come you shall be received to joy unspeakable and full of glory. Yea, you shall be received to such a state of unutterable happiness, that the expression I have now made use of, is far too low to set it forth: So much too low, that this expression, in all its strength, is applied to the pleasure which believers experience, in their present state of imperfection and hope. "Whom having not seen ye love, in whom though ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

If, therefore, you are not very happy, notwithstanding your poverty, it is your own fault. You may be the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ—you may be heirs of all things. Be exhorted, then, to be rich; don't abide any longer in a state of spiritual poverty. To be poor in this world, and to be spiritually poor too, how unhappy a case is that! remember that your present poverty will be no excuse for you at the judgment day. If you are then found among the despi-

fers of the gospel, you will be poor indeed. You will be left destitute of all peace and hope, and the Saviour whom you now despise, will have no mercy on you.

And if any of you that are poor in this world have obtained the mercy of the Lord to be true believers in Christ, the fee, is plentiful consolation for you. For all things are your's if you are Christ's. If you want any outward blessing, it is because your Head and Saviour thinks it best for you not to have it. Is there any outward good that would be of real service to you? You may depend on its being granted you.—The Lord Jesus Christ watches over you with more care and solicitude than any earthly parent over her young and helpless offspring, and you may look on every thing about you as your's—as being devoted to your use and benefit. It is all in the possession of Christ who is promoting the most wise and holy ends, by all things, so that life is your's, death is your's, things present and things to come, all are your's, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's.

What an happy thing it must be to be heirs of all things through him! This is that stone which turns every thing into gold. It puts an air of chearfulness on every thing around us. It can make poverty rejoice and the prisoner leap for joy. It lays a solid foundation for hope, and expectations full of immortality and glory. We are here, my friends, to tarry but a little while. A few moments more, and we must bid adieu to every thing beneath the sun, and then how very insignificant a question will it appear,

whether we have been poor or rich? Let us, then, never be discouraged from devoting ourselves to God in Christ, through fear, lest our temporal happiness should be lessened by it. A child would act as reasonably, who should keep away from his father's house, lose the benefit of his instruction and inheritance, forfeit his father's estate, for fear lest he might inherit something short, or be compelled to follow an irksome duty, during his minority. We can in nothing so much consult our own best good, as by becoming truly religious, by turning to God, as he invites us to do, and accepting his mercy in Christ, and living devoted to him. To live a day longer, without doing this, may be fatal to us, and I doubt not but that I have the testimony of many of your consciences, that what I say is truth. You are convinced that the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths peace, and that in keeping God's commands, there is great reward, and that you are acting against the light of your own minds, while you remain in your natural unconverted state. Why then will you so contradict yourselves, contradict your own conviction, and remain easy in a state that is infinitely hazardous? Why will you refuse wealth, when it is offered you? Why will you remain poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked, when you have such an opportunity to escape those evils? Why will you trample under your feet eternal glory, and court destruction as those seem to do, who willingly run such an awful hazard?

